

Seattle Human Services Department Strategic Investment Plan Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Strategic Investment Plan?

The Strategic Investment Plan provides high-level policy direction and recommendations for the City's investments in the people of Seattle. It will help set human services investment priorities, guide budgeting decisions and select the most effective strategies.

2. What does the Strategic Investment Plan do and why is it important?

State and federal funding for human services programs is declining and unpredictable, and cities bear the impact. At the same time, City revenues are down. The Strategic Investment Plan:

- Guides our efforts to use limited human services resources as wisely and effectively as possible.
- Helps us to identify the programs that are most successful at improving community conditions.
- Encourages us to collaborate with other funders to achieve community goals.
- Supports Mayor Greg Nickels' priorities to:
 - Create jobs and economic opportunity for all.
 - Build strong families and healthy communities.

3. What are the Strategic Investment Plan's recommendations?

1. Target the City's investments in human services so that they align with the six community goals, as developed and adopted by the City of Seattle, King County and United Way of King County. These community goals are to ensure that every member of our community has:
 - Food to eat and a roof overhead
 - Supportive relationships within families, neighborhoods and communities
 - A safe haven from all forms of violence and abuse
 - Health care to be as physically and mentally fit as possible
 - Education and job skills to lead an independent life
 - Equal access to high-quality human services
2. Develop an improved system of accountability and evaluation that allows us to measure the success of funded programs — to measure how they are improving community conditions. Set aside a minimum of 1 percent of General Funds from every RFP to evaluate whether a set of services or programs is improving community conditions:
 - Evaluate program effectiveness — does the program do what it says it will do?
 - Evaluate community indicators — how many folks are hungry? How many youth are graduating?The evaluation plan will help us use limited resources as wisely and effectively as possible.

What are the Strategic Investment Plan's recommendations? (continued)

3. Work toward two main human services funding objectives:
 - Preserve a safety net of essential emergency services, meaning programs that help people in crisis, such as emergency food and shelter.
 - Increase, over time, the investment in programs that help people achieve social and economic success, meaning programs that prevent or reduce people's dependence on the safety net.
4. Make sure the City's investments in children and youth services are aligned with other City-wide and departmental efforts so that, together, we can improve the health, education and safety of children and youth with the greatest need.
5. Work with the newly formed King County Funders Alliance for Children and Youth to develop a common policy framework that:
 - Aligns goals and strategies.
 - Improves funding decisions.
 - Provides a more efficient delivery system.
 - Ultimately improves the health and education of children and youth.
 - Develops a coordinated system for children and youth, much like the system we have for senior services.

4. What will change as a result of the Strategic Investment Plan?

We will continue to move away from simply purchasing units of service (for example, meals and counseling hours) and toward funding those programs that contribute most to improving community conditions. To help with this effort, the City will improve evaluation of funded programs and direct dollars to the programs that get the best results. Over time, our investment in the safety net *and* in services that help people achieve economic and social success will reduce human suffering.

5. What are the implications of the Strategic Investment Plan on agencies?

The Strategic Investment Plan is a policy framework and emphasizes a movement toward contracting that is focused on outcomes. Most of our human services contracts are already "outcomes-based" and agencies will remain accountable for their contract outcomes. The Human Services Department will collect individual performance data from contracted agencies. We will continue to issue requests for proposals (RFPs) and focus contracts and investments on services that are most effectively improving community conditions.

6. How was the Strategic Investment Plan developed?

In 2002, the Seattle City Council established a policy priority to develop an “outcomes-based” strategic investment plan to guide the City’s investments in human services. The plan was to include:

- A current investments inventory.
- General and specific goals.
- Strategies to reach those goals.
- Measurement and evaluation systems and tools to ensure investment effectiveness.

The Strategic Investment Plan was developed over an eight-month period by Human Services Department staff working with staff from the Office of Policy and Management and Department of Finance. We also held 40 focus groups with community stakeholders, who contributed valuable opinions and feedback.

7. How was feedback from community stakeholders incorporated into the Strategic Investment Plan?

Feedback from community stakeholder focus groups that was incorporated into the SIP included the following concepts:

- A broad range of community needs and goals exist.
- There is more need out there than what is met by currently available services.
- Providing a continuum of services that help people in crisis (safety net) *and* prevent crises (help people achieve social and economic success) is important.
- Evaluation can help to identify the types of programs that most effectively improve community conditions.

8. What happens next with implementation of the Strategic Investment Plan?

The plan was approved last fall by Mayor Greg Nickels and the full Council is scheduled to adopt the plan in April 2004. We will then:

- Work with community partners to further develop an evaluation plan to measure success at improving community conditions.
- Follow a regular schedule for RFPs that will help us issue contracts-based outcomes that improve community conditions.
- Consult with Council to translate the SIP into budget priorities and submit a 2005-2006 budget which reflects those priorities.
- Work with other funders to form the new King County Funders Alliance for Children and Youth and coordinate funding of programs that support young people and maximize results.
- Report annually on funding allocations between the two objectives — preserving the safety net and helping people achieve social and economic success.
- Update the SIP every two years.

9. How can one get a copy of the Strategic Investment Plan, and get involved in the process?

Visit www.ci.seattle.wa.us/humanservices/SIP/SIP.htm or call Julie Nelson at 206-684-0322. We will continue to ask for community feedback via email, web surveys and stakeholder focus groups.

Seattle Human Services Department

Strategic Investment Plan

Glossary

Community goals — Six community goals as developed and adopted by the City of Seattle, King County and United Way of King County. (See Q&A No. 3)

City human services goals — What the City wants to achieve through its human services funding and programs.

Community conditions — Conditions within a community. For example, homelessness and education levels. Many of our City human services goals are directed at improving specific community conditions.

Community indicators — The measurement that tells us the community condition — how many people are homeless? How many or what percentage of incoming students are ready for school, or graduate from high school?

Program outcomes — What the City wants the providers of human services to achieve with the funding awarded — the expected results of human services delivery. For example, X number of families found permanent housing or X number of families avoided becoming homeless. Program outcomes include services provided by the City as well as those provided by community-based, nonprofit organizations with which the City contracts.

Funding objectives — The overarching reason for investment in human services. The objectives describe the continuum of human service programs, from safety net services to prevention programs. Each City human services goal has programs that relate to one or both funding objectives.

Community stakeholders — Community-based nonprofit organizations (human services providers), advocates, clients, other funders (King County, United Way of King County and private foundations) and interested community members (neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations and employers.)

Request for Proposals (RFP) — An open, competitive process to select the entity offering the best services for meeting the outcomes desired, in a cost-efficient manner.